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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a pilot project conducted at the College of Education, Wayne State University (Michigan), to explore the potential of the portfolio process as a tool for assessing the professional skill development of student teachers and the effectiveness of the teacher preparation program. Project goals included the promotion and development of reflective, innovative professionals; provision of concrete evidence of student competency; and enhancement of collaboration with schools. A framework is provided for discussing implementation of the project, staff and student orientation, and recruitment of university faculty and school personnel as reviewers. Over 200 students presented portfolios before a 2-member review team composed of university and school personnel. Following the presentations, reviewers and students were given reaction sheets to record assessments of the overall process as well as of individual presentations. Responses suggest that most students felt the portfolio presented an accurate picture of their skills and experiences; reviewers indicated that a strong sense of collegiality emerged during the review process. Informants' suggestions will be used to form the basis for policy recommendations in future rounds. (LL)

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Beyond Assessment: University/School Collaboration in Portfolio Review and the Challenge to Program Improvement

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Abstract

Over 200 students presented their portfolios before a two member review team; university and school personnel. There were two goals of the project (1) to provide concrete evidence that students developed competence (2) to enhance collaboration with the schools, renew commitment throughout the University and increase knowledge regarding the teacher preparation program.

Introduction

Assessment of skill development in teacher preparation programs is a challenge that does not lend itself readily to solution. Beyond assessment itself, there is the further challenge of using the knowledge gained from assessment to reshape and improve programs. The common practice of assigning trained professionals to observe students in clinical settings and share observations and assessments with them over an extended period of time is still perhaps the best method available to teacher educators who must assess performance that is not adequately measured by traditional question and answer tests. But even where this approach functions best, it is generally carried out on a somewhat personal level which can be of great benefit to the developing student, but offers little likelihood that knowledge gained by professionals in the process will find its way into any systematic process for program improvement. It was to a great extent the concern for program improvement that in 1990 led the College of Education at Wayne State University in Detroit to begin seriously exploring the potential of the portfolio process as a tool for assessing not only the professional skill development of students but the effectiveness of the teacher preparation program as well.

The Ohio Consortium for Portfolio Development (Central State University, University of Dayton, Wright State University and the Dayton Public Schools) has worked for several years on the use of portfolios to document students' growth, knowledge of content and development of reflective abilities (Cole, 1991, 1992). The Consortium recognized that portfolios are both a process and a product.

> It is as a process that portfolios can be significant in developing reflection among teacher education students and teachers. When students and teachers make decisions about the way in which they organize portfolios, they need to reflect about their understanding of professional roles and responsibilities. (Cole, et al., 1991, p.4).

From the outset, Wayne State faculty viewed the portfolio process as a self-assessment tool to be used in a University/School partnership that would cut across academic disciplines, roles and responsibilities. Using the portfolio to strengthen this collaboration sets this approach apart from other assessments used in teacher evaluation programs (Collins, A. 1990; Terry, Backman & Eade, 1983). Throughout this process not only are students prodded to reflect on their experiences in the program, but faculty are also pushed to reflect on their roles as teacher educators and on the effectiveness of program elements, including course offerings, field experiences and program directions.

Wayne State is an urban University with an enrollment of approximately 34,000 students. The College of Education enrolls approximately 3,500 students, a third of whom are in initial teacher preparation programs. The University is located practically in the geographic center of the City of Detroit and draws its student population primarily from six counties in southeast Michigan. In preparation for the NCATE internal review process, the College of Education in 1991 adopted as an organizing theme, **The Urban Educator as a Reflective Innovative Professional.** The faculty felt that this theme, in the words of Galluzzo and Pankratz, "captures the consensus of faculty beliefs and describes the type of teacher the program seeks to graduate" (1990, p.10). Using the theme as a starting point, the Teacher Education faculty developed ten teaching competencies that students would be required to demonstrate through the development and presentation of portfolios.

Goals and Objectives of the Project

The goal of this project was to promote the development of reflective and innovative professionals for urban education. Two objectives were agreed upon as means to achieve the desired goal.

The portfolio process will provide concrete evidence that students have satisfactorily developed competence in the following areas:

- Knows academic content and a variety of teaching methods;
- organizes and implements effective instructional programs;
- demonstrates appropriate classroom management techniques to ensure a safe and orderly environment conducive to learning;
- stimulates creative and critical thinking;
- has knowledge of human growth and development;
- has a commitment to students and their learning;
- uses listening, speaking, reading and writing skills effectively;
- behaves in an ethical, reflective and professional manner;
- understands the importance of multi-cultural perspectives;
- applies appropriate assessment, evaluation and testing procedures.

The portfolio process will enhance collaboration among university and school personnel, renew commitment throughout the University, and increase knowledge regarding the teacher preparation program.

Implementation of the Project

Students in the WSU teacher certification program have from two to four semesters of pre-student teaching and student teaching experiences in K-12 schools. Elementary education students have two semesters of pre-student teaching (four half days a week) and one semester of student teaching (five full days). Secondary education students have one semester of pre-student teaching (five half days a week) and one semester of student teaching (five full days a week). Early childhood, special education and bilingual education students have two semesters of pre-student teaching and two semesters of student teaching.

In the Fall of 1991 the portfolio process was introduced as an option to Elementary Education instructors who teach methods courses and supervise the first pre-student teaching experience. Several instructors chose to participate in this pilot process involving approximately 75 students who began developing their portfolios that term. In the Winter term, 1992, portfolios became a requirement for all students in their first pre-student teaching experience, involving approximately 250 students. In the Fall of 1992 the portfolio was made a requirement for all students in certification programs and no student could receive a grade for student teaching without developing and presenting a portfolio. This gradual implementation provided a full academic year to educate students regarding the process and the product, and to make the faculty a part of the process. By Winter, 1993 all 1000 certification students were involved in portfolio development.

Orientation

Staff and students were given printed material stating the purpose of the project, listing expectations and outlining a possible format for the portfolio. They were also given copies of recent articles on the use of portfolios and were provided opportunity to discuss the project and brainstorm ideas with project directors.

A series of student workshops, required and optional, were conducted to explain the purpose of the portfolio assignment and give concrete suggestions for selecting and organizing content. Students were also given printed material suggesting the following format for presentations:

a brief introduction including name, teaching major and minor and other such pertinent information,

a summary of field experiences, pre-student teaching and student teaching,

a short review of materials included in the portfolio and

a ten to fifteen minute expansion on the highlights of the portfolio.

Faculty reinforced the concept of the portfolio as representing the skill level of the beginning teacher. Students were informed that portfolios would not be graded, but that development and presentation of a portfolio would be required to receive a grade for student teaching. Once the portfolio became a requirement for program completion, faculty and students alike began displaying a serious level of involvement and commitment to the process. In December, 1992, 236 portfolios were presented. Only four students completing student teaching failed to meet the requirement, choosing instead to have their grades deferred to a later time.

Recruitment of Reviewers

One hundred fifty letters were sent to principals, teachers, curriculum leaders, counselors, superintendents, university faculty, administrators and Education alumni inviting them to participate as reviewers in the portfolio process. A total of 100 people agreed to participate. Twelve school districts were represented, one of which was the Detroit Public School System which had twenty-four different schools represented. Fifteen faculty from the Teacher Education Division served as reviewers along with faculty from other units in the College and the University. The Dean and all assistant deans in the College of Education also served as reviewers.

Portfolio Review

Reviewers were assigned to two person teams and given a choice of reviewing in a four hour block of time during an evening or on a Saturday. Professionals from the schools were teamed with University personnel in an attempt to broaden the perspectives of the reviewing teams. Each two person team reviewed between three and five portfolios in half hour blocks of time. Students were assigned on the basis of their time preferences. No attempt was made to match academic specializations of students and reviewers. The anticipation was that the invited reviewers would be fully capable of assessing levels of professional knowledge and teaching skills regardless of academic specialties.

Reviewers were asked to arrive one half hour before the presentations began to provide time for refreshments, a short orientation and an opportunity to meet and visit with other reviewers assigned to the same block of time.

The reviewers had five to ten minutes to ask questions for clarification or offer suggestions which might expand or improve the portfolio. At the end of the presentations, reviewers and students were given reaction sheets to record their assessments of the overall process as well as of the individual presentations.

Student Responses

Students were asked four questions regarding the portfolio process. With each question there was an opportunity to make additional comments.

Do you think the portfolio represented you favorably as a beginning professional?

Do you feel you were given enough time to develop your portfolio?

On a scale of one to five with five being high, how would you rate the help you received from cooperating teachers, WSU instructors and field supervisors in developing your portfolio?

What suggestions would you make to improve the portfolio process?

Two hundred thirty of the 236 students completed the student response sheet. In response to the first question relative to how well the presentation represented the student's professional skills, 88% of the students answered yes. Most felt that the portfolio presented an accurate picture of their skills and experiences. A typical comment was, "The portfolio is a good way to give a brief synopsis of the work I have done to prepare myself for becoming a teacher." Students also commented that the portfolio helped them clarify exactly what they had done in their pre-student teaching and student teaching assignments and had given them a chance to articulate some of their beliefs regarding education. They also saw the advantage of recognizing areas that

needed improvement. A number of students commented that they had begun to see themselves as teachers rather than University students. Of the 12% who felt the portfolios did not reflect their skills as teachers, the most prevalent comment was that they found it difficult to present some of the intangibles of classroom teaching in the portfolio format. One comment referred to the difficulty of documenting the teacher's "manner" with children; another referred to the difficulty of "describing yourself on paper."

In response to the second question, students did not feel that they had enough time to prepare the portfolios; some stated that they felt "rushed," especially during this time when they were trying to devote their full attention to student teaching. This was the reason given by the four students who elected to defer their student teaching grades and present their portfolios after completing the student teaching experience. Others stated that they were unsure of the expectations of the assignment. One student summed up her difficulty with the assignment by stating, "I feel it's hard to put into words who I am in so few pages."

In response to the third question asking students to rate the help they received from professionals in preparing their portfolios, responses were distributed as follows:

Excellent	5	20%
	4	10%
Fair	3	21%
	2	27%
Poor	1	20%

2% did not answer the question.

This distribution may reflect the large number of students completing the assignment and the varying ways that instructors and supervisors interpreted the requirement to their students.

The fourth question asked for suggestions for improving the process of portfolio development and review. Most responses clustered around two concerns: (1) more and clearer directions and (2) more time to complete the assignment. Some students felt the assignment should be given earlier in the professional program so students can put more time into the project. Some suggested that students be given examples and sample portfolios; others suggested that uniform content be required, and still others preferred the open format because of the opportunity it provided for creative ideas. Virtually all of the students stated that they were glad the portfolio requirement had been implemented. The element for which they expressed most appreciation was the feedback from reviewers. They overwhelmingly agreed with the decision not to assign a grade for the portfolio.

Reviewer Responses

Reviewers were asked six questions.

Do you think the portfolios adequately represented the students as beginning professionals?

Do you feel the students were given enough time to present their portfolios and receive responses from reviewers?

Did the presentations further your understanding of the Teacher Education program at Wayne State?

What is your overall impression of Wayne State University students as a group?

Why did you agree to serve as a reviewer?

What suggestions would you make to improve the portfolio process?

Of the 90 reviewers who completed the response forms, 98% reported that the portfolios represented the students favorably as beginning teachers. Perhaps more significant than the percentage of positive responses were the comments made by reviewers relative to the portfolios as representations of beginning professionals. Typical comments were:

"excellent activity",

"a fairly accurate picture of the students--much better than expected",

"a good medium for dialogue and interchange of ideas",

"well prepared",

"creative".

Some comments focused on the purposes that could be served by this activity:

"The presentations provide students with the opportunity to present the best of their experiences as beginning educators".

"This concept is an excellent one. It certainly will help students develop confidence. . . ."

In response to the third question asking if the reviewers' understanding of the teacher preparation program was furthered by the presentation, 94% said yes. The remaining 6% who said no were all Teacher Education faculty since they were already familiar with the program. Almost half the respondents identified specific elements of the teacher preparation program for which they

gained appreciation as a result of their involvement in the review process. Most frequently mentioned were:

emphasis of the program on multi-cultural education,

focus on integration of urban and suburban issues,

interdisciplinary nature of the teacher preparation program and

the varied field experiences of the student teaching program.

One reviewer commented,

> "It was great to see what is going on in other disciplines. The process reinforces the notion of cross disciplinary education. We can't isolate ourselves. If teachers learn to work and support each other's subject matter, hopefully students can see many types of relationships."

Three reviewers who were teacher education faculty stated that the reviewing process enhanced their own professional development. Typical comments were:

"It gave me ideas for improving my methods classes",

"helped me see how to refine our students' idea of the portfolio",

"what was particularly helpful for me is that I now have a better understanding of how I can help prepare my students for this process!!"

Reviewers gave a wide range of responses to the question of why they agreed to participate in the process. Reasons given included:

commitment to portfolios as a tool for assessment,

commitment to the University's efforts in teacher preparation,

desire to learn how the program was attempting to develop reflective educators,

reciprocation to the College for placing student teachers in their schools and

it sounded like it would be enjoyable and interesting.

Teacher Education faculty stated that they felt a commitment to help their students in their preparation as future professionals.

The list of suggestions given by reviewers for improving the process gave a clear indication that reviewers took the experience seriously. Some observed that students had varying degrees of understanding regarding content and format of the portfolio and needed more specific direction for organizing and preparing for the presentation. Some reviewers observed that if the portfolio is also to be used for job interviews it would need to be revised in a number of ways. They suggested that students be given guidance on how to present portfolios at job interviews, and that a library of exemplary portfolios be developed and seminars offered where students can share, discuss and review each others portfolios. They also suggested that students need to actually participate in mock job interviews. Others suggested that students be included on the review panels.

Findings and Conclusions

To a great extent, the first objective of the project, to provide concrete evidence that students have satisfactorily developed competence in ten specific areas was met. Although not always specifically labeled, the activities or lessons chosen by the students to be included in portfolios consistently reflected seven of the ten competencies and were recognized as such by the reviewers, as witnessed by such comments as "understands multicultural perspectives," and "knows content and methods of teaching." Three skill areas that did not emerge prominently in this process were: "demonstrates appropriate classroom management techniques to ensure a safe and orderly environment conducive to learning;" "has knowledge of human growth and

development;" and "applies appropriate assessment, evaluation and testing procedures." The fact that very little was included in the portfolios to represent knowledge and skill in these three areas may be the result of too little guidance in the preparation of the portfolios, the lack of emphasis on these areas in the program, or some other reason that will become evident in future experiences with portfolios. The specific concerns of students and reviewers will be addressed in the next review process. In any case, this first attempt at requiring all students completing the program to develop a portfolio has set the stage for developing a valuable assessment tool to be used by the Teacher Education faculty.

Probably the most surprising outcome in this first round was the level of enthusiasm displayed throughout the process by school personnel and faculty from throughout the university. The half hour orientation for reviewers turned out to be an excellent device for quickly emerging reviewers in the process. Many saw it as an opportunity for personal and professional exchange of ideas and took full advantage of the situation. Spirited discussions in these sessions far exceeded expectations and were extremely encouraging from the perspective of university/school relations.

Project directors, in assisting students and faculty in the portfolio development process, observing the review process, and evaluating the response sheets, were made aware that there were omissions in the competencies listed. One omission was "skill in working with parents and support staff." Other objectives were not worded as well as they might have been in materials distributed to students and faculty. A positive result is that

the faculty has decided to review all competencies required in the certification program.

The second objective "to enhance collaboration among university and school personnel, renew commitment throughout the University, and increase knowledge regarding the teacher preparation program" was achieved to a far greater extent than originally anticipated. Faculty members, college and university administrators and school personnel were extremely enthusiastic in their participation and responses to the questionnaires. Virtually all expressed a desire to help new professionals and emphasized how much they enjoyed the experience. All but one said they would serve again if invited. Teaming WSU faculty with school personnel was beneficial for everyone involved. A strong sense of collegiality emerged during the review process that will be built upon in future efforts. Reviewers made it clear that they had gained considerable insight into and appreciation for the teacher preparation program.

The College learned a great deal from this round of portfolio development and presentation, and changes in requirements and procedures are being made in preparation for the next round. Beginning with pre-student teaching, students will have opportunities for continued dialogue, seminars and forums for exchange of ideas on portfolio development. These exchanges will allow for feedback prior to the final presentation. At a monthly student teaching seminar, former students who have presented outstanding portfolios the previous term will show their product to students and share their thoughts about the process. There will also be greater emphasis in pre-student teaching course work on the reflective decisions students are expected

to make, as well as on the guidance they need as they develop their portfolios. Student responses to this first large scale experience with portfolios has served to intensify faculty commitment to continue and improve the process. Students consistently expressed great appreciation for the time the professionals took with them. Many reported that they took reviewers' comments and suggestions very seriously and that they came away from the process with a feeling of elation.

In future rounds the purpose of the portfolio must be made clearer to reviewers. Printed materials given to reviewers will be the same as that given to faculty and students; however, it will probably have to be expanded to accommodate first time reviewers who will need more background information than students and faculty involved in the program on a daily basis. Orientation sessions for reviewers will continue, but will focus more on the need to assess presentations on the basis of the stated objectives. Reviewers and students must have a common perception of the purpose of the portfolio: it is not a product for presentation at a job interview, even though that may be a logical next step. The purpose, from the College perspective, is to assist students in fine tuning their teaching skills, and to guide faculty in the on-going process of program improvement. Based on the results of this effort, the portfolio process not only appears well suited to the goals of student and program evaluation, but goes beyond this assessment and builds collaboration with schools. The College of Education at Wayne State is committed to making it a permanent part of the teacher preparation program.

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